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ABSTRACT

The development of a course on the counseling of women is presented with a list of core topics, the bases for counseling women. The course topics include psychological and sociological factors, developmental theory, sex-role learning, perception of the female role, bias in counseling and testing, career choice, psychopathology, group counseling, and counselor training programs. The emphasis on research identification and skill development is discussed. Guidelines for therapy with women are described in terms of: (1) socialization and sex-role development; (2) discriminatory practices; (3) the counselor's role; (4) behavioral contracting; (5) client rights; (6) career development; and (7) needs of special populations. Student reactions to the course as well as obstacles encountered in teaching such a course are indicated. (Author/HLM)

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AFFIRMATIVE COUNSELING:

DEVELOPING A COURSE, AND MORE...

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American Psychological Association
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Presented at the Division 17 symposium, "Achieving Sex-Fair Counseling: Current Interventions in Counselor/Psychology Training."

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Dr. Joan D. Hemmer
American Psychological Association
September, 1979

Gil Wrenn stated back in 1962 that, "by 1980 we may look with bewilderment upon the 1960 attitude that women are restricted in their occupational choice because they are women. Counselors and teachers contribute to this restrictive concept almost as much as do parents" (Wrenn, 1962). As we peer right around the corner at 1980, what is truly bewildering is that so little has changed in the counseling of women. There have been some important changes in society in attitudes about equal pay for equal work and about women entering non-traditional occupations. But even a brief look at the salaries of female workers, status of the ERA, affirmative action programs in higher education (Theodore, 1978) radical forces attacking the Supreme Court decision on abortion, The Report of the APA Task Force on Sex Bias and Sex-Role Stereotyping in Psychotherapeutic Practice (1975), and the media confirms our suspicions in general, and in counseling psychology in particular, that change is slow in coming.

There is a need to change not only current counseling practices to reflect professional advances, but also to develop ways to implement the recent APA (1978) guidelines for sex-fair counseling (therapy with women). During the past 10 years, the rise of psychology of women courses, women's studies programs, and courses on sexism and sex-role stereotyping has been a part of the Women's Movement which has affected college and university faculty and students alike. Sometimes a course was developed by a faculty member within a department, sometimes for a continuing education offering, sometimes as a colloquium or seminar and sometimes for Women's Center's activities. Given nourishing environments, such as the one I was

in during 1975 at the University of Massachusetts, such courses attracted large numbers of appreciative and dynamic students, both traditional and non-traditional, and almost always, primarily female. Such courses flourished, but only as "offerings", not as permanent, integrated aspects of either undergraduate or graduate programs. If they became permanent courses, it usually meant within the women's studies program, rather than within a department.

In clinical and counseling training, no specific course existed which surveyed theory and research in the areas of sexism and discrimination, women's changing roles, women's education, the laws, or special needs and concerns in therapy with women. Later I found out that here and there faculty members were beginning to design such academic offerings (Katrin, 1976), but totally from "scratch." The need to give more than lip service in another course within counseling (such as "Professional Issues in Counseling") or to simply encourage graduate students to include female subjects in their thesis designs, was apparent to anyone trying to deal effectively with their female clients. Familiarity with the literature (Broverman, Broverman, Clarkson, Rosenkrantz & Vogel, 1970), with counseling and mental health centers, with clients and with training programs gave more than enough impetus to try to develop an appropriate course.

As one such effort, I first taught a course in the counseling of women at the University of Massachusetts during Spring semester, 1976, and have since taught courses at St. Cloud State University.

It was a "labor of love" for the graduate and undergraduate students and myself who researched the proliferating literature for many months before the first offering as a course. Specific questions to be answered were: How does the female client fare in the present therapy situation? What factors in society/socialization help to bring her to counseling/therapy? How are those concerns addressed by therapists - male and/or female? Are present models and modes of therapy adequate for women? Are there changes needed in the practice and/or training of counselors of women to improve their effectiveness?

Course Development

To develop a course like this alone would have been a monumental task. No textbooks existed, no extensive compilations of research were available, no "universe of content" had yet been defined. As Susan Katrin (1976) said, "No prototype for such a course was known to us at the Georgia State University, nor was any found in our perusal of the literature." Looking back on it now, what is surprising is that I really did not expect there to be anything in existence, not that there wasn't. Such was the conditioning of female counselors! And, such was the invisibility of "woman" in counseling!

Content

Psychology of women was the closest approximation to a content that I could formulate, but it did not survey research and theory in the specific practice of therapy or counseling with women. Compilations of syllabi from women's studies courses and two journals, Counseling Psychologist (1973, Vol. 4, #1) and Personnel & Guidance Journal, (1972, Vol. 51, #2) were entire issues devoted to women and counseling women. However, the approach

was more editorial than research, and the need to ferret out the research literature was evident. Some professional counseling collections of articles (Guttman, 1974; Nickerson & Williams, 1973), collections of references (Astin, 1974; Carey, Murphy & Wasserman, 1975) and counseling reviews of literature (McEwen, 1975) could be photocopied for students, but it took a group of us six months to produce our first 30-page list of references related to selected topical issues.

A weekly seminar helped us to stay on task, to sort our findings, to organize and discuss the research. Often, our own areas of interest led up blind alleys, or led to endless discussions of the importance of various articles. By spring semester of 1976, we felt ready to offer the first University of Massachusetts counseling of women course, and I put together a syllabus and course format, and proceeded to teach the most exciting course yet in my teaching career. Both the course and the format have been repeated and refined, but certainly not perfected. To keep current with the research would require constant attention. In my present position, I have been able to teach the course just once in three years, and that is not enough to keep it current. Since then, textbooks which contain many of the classic articles have become available for students (Franks & Burtle, 1974; Hansen & Rapoza, 1978; Harmon, Birk, Fitzgerald & Tanney, 1977; Medick, Tangri, & Hoffman, 1975), but much of the best material is still available only as original articles.

Major Topics:

The core topics for the course are: Psychological, personality and

sociological bases for counseling women; the counseling basis; developmental theories, particularly, sex-role development; perceptions about the female role; bias in counseling and testing; the consequences of developmental issues in counseling (e.g., career development of women); interpretations of psychopathology; group counseling formats for women; special populations; new counseling frameworks for women, and training programs for counselors of women.

Research Emphasis:

Within each major area, outstanding recent contributions to the literature are identified. The content of the course, the lack of past research about women as counseling clients, or "women" as a variable at all in psychological research (Carlson, 1972; Johnson, 1978), the lack of sensitivity to the existence of an alternative conception of mental health of women as whatever healthy men are not (Broverman, et al, 1970), all pointed to research as the main focus of the course.

In the case of teaching counseling of women, there is a need to create the discipline as we teach it. As evidence for this, in our 30 pages of early references, most of the authors are females, or couples, and recent reading of the research indicates little change in this situation. Thus, students are required to do research projects which prepare them to contribute to a foundation upon which a viable theory or theories of counseling women may be built. With the semester course, we also included a six-session module on research skills. Completed group projects, as well as individual, have been excellent products (see sample list at end).

Meeting the Guidelines

While the course is generally taught by topics, today I also wish to discuss the content in relation to the "Guidelines for Therapy with Women" (1978) which have been passed out to you.

1. Socialization of sex-role development. Developmental theory which promotes gender-defined roles and sex-role stereotypes was outlined and contrasted with a combination model from Loevinger's theory of ego development (1966) and from Block (1973) which frees female development from prior constriction. Other topics included here were achievement motivation, self-esteem, attribution of causality, sex differences, masculinity-femininity-androgyny, female role perceptions, aggression, and feminine development in schools.
2. Sex discrimination practices. How sex-role stereotypes enter into clinical judgments of mental health (Abramowitz, 1973; Broverman, et al, 1970; Chesler, 1972),into bias within counselors and psychologists (Voss & Cannon, 1978),into power relationships between counselor and client (Abramowitz, 1973; Chesler, 1973), into educational and occupational counseling, into life styles and other choices are clarified.
3. Current empirical findings on sex-roles, sexism and individual differences resulting from the client's gender-defined identity. Sex-differences research, bias in counseling and testing, career development data on women's employment and sex discrimination in the world of work, personality research on fear of success, and perceptions of women's

roles as related to careers and families are topics of interest here.

4. Theoretical concepts employed by therapist should be free of sex bias and sex-role stereotypes. The first major section of the course looks at the historical and current bases for counseling and therapy, and at the ways counselors have interpreted the theorists (e.g., Freud, Erikson, Skinner). Whether personality, sociological, counseling or psychological theories are investigated, the underlying assumptions about females are basis for scrutiny regarding bias. Upon close look many of the theories when applied would do most females more harm than good (Voss & Gannon, 1978; Weisstein, 1971). It has been suggested that many feminist therapy ideas "may appear no different from what is considered humanistic therapy. It is of utmost importance to remember that if a humanistic therapy is sexist, the therapy is not humanistic (Sablove, 1975)."
5. While not a major emphasis, the language section has been of much interest. Body language and non-verbal communication should be included. What is the utility of a women's smile? What about eye contact - woman and man, woman and woman, mother and child?
6. The Psychologist should avoid establishing the source of personal problems within the client when they are more properly attributable to situational or cultural factors. Attention is focused upon counseling and personality theories/theorists who inherently include environment and the complex interaction of person and environment (behavioral, social learning, cognitive-developmental.)Ecological systems, Piagetian

psychology, and Thomas Szasz are useful for discussion of the attribution of pathology to society's victims. Interpretations of psychopathology is an important section where #6 is applied specifically.

7. Contracts are discussed, especially as outlined by the behavioral therapists, for maximum involvement of female clients. While women often seek a therapist who will tell them how to live their lives, it is considered a particular problem in the counseling of women that some therapists intend to establish dependency relationships rather than to encourage taking control of one's own life.
8. Changes in the laws regarding 'open records' are very important for both counselors and clients to understand. Some legal discussion of client "rights" is particularly important for women (Chesler, 1972).
9. The whole issue of paternalism and the position of women within the paternalistic society is highlighted within nearly every major topical area (Chesler, 1973; Weisstein, 1971). A careful review of psychoanalysis in this framework is possible, although students are already sensitized to Freud's formulations, and very little Freudian influence upon student's philosophy of counseling has been found.
10. Career development of women, as one example, includes many opportunities to look at the prevailing double standard of appropriate job behaviors. Also, the "newer frameworks" topic includes assertiveness training as a recommended mode of treatment.
11. Special populations - battered wives, incest victims, widows, poor women, third world women, rape victims, drug and alcohol dependent

women and displaced homemakers are among groups of female clients whose special needs and concerns are the subject of a major section of the course.

12. Newer frameworks includes a section on perspective and therapies which address issues of "soma", alternative life styles for women, and new patterns for discovering female sexuality (pre-orgasmic workshops). Counseling lesbians, is also a part of special populations - a new role for many counselors of women.

13. Always, the issue of client/psychologist sexual relations is raised by students in class, and is discussed as an ethical issue for practitioners, with legal, personal and professional ramifications. Much research is needed in this particular area of concern to counseling of women. An encouraging sign is the article by Ann Belford Ulanov (1979) which gives suggestions to the therapist who is treating a client who has been sexually involved with her former male therapist.

The appropriateness of counselor/client match, or even the relevance of individual counseling or therapy for treating socially-induced "pathology" in women are questioned throughout. Should there be particular kinds of counselors for clients with particular problems? How is one to distinguish a "feminist" counselor? How does self-help and peer or para-professional counseling fit into the counseling of women? Are counseling collectives (or other alternatives) viable modes of providing treatment for women?

Building the Clientele

Students

While hoping that the courses would attract practicing psychologists and counselors, the greatest interest so far is among pre-professional students - those who think that someday they want to be counseling women in various settings. Those already trained report that the greatest value in the course is meeting their needs of not always understanding their female clients nor the changes in society, of looking at ways to expand alternatives, of helping them to be freed from restrictive concepts about women.

Where does the course fit with training programs?

Affirmative counseling for women has the potential for improving counseling for all clients. Whether it is a preservice course, an in-service continuing education certified course for practicing counselors/psychologists, or a general elective offering in psychology, or all three, it is a must for anyone who hopes to counsel women of the future.

> Male therapists and counselors have not given the issue of counseling women high priority. As a reaction to this continued devaluation, women have taken to forming feminist counseling collectives and some exclusion of men has taken place. Unless men become more concerned with the issue of the changing roles in our society, women, out of necessity, will continue to support each other to the exclusion of men (Katrin, 1976).

Affirmative counseling is not a "re-packaging" of old content, as some of our male colleagues would like to believe. It is new content which builds upon the old, but discards a great deal and goes

much further than the old. As a colleague said when asked where he thought the psychology of women fit into the general scheme of things, he replied, "Oh, isn't the psychology of women just a sub set of differential psychology?" Affirmative counseling is a "set", not a sub-set.

Practicing counselors and psychologists will have to re-examine their views in light of the "current literature written by those in close touch with large numbers of that particular population. In the same vein, any male (or female) therapist who has not kept abreast of current theory and issues relating to women is treating them from a position of ignorance. The sample of women in his/her personal life does not provide sufficient clinical data or theory on which to base therapy (Brodsky, 1973)."

Obstacles

The resistances have been many. Some psychology departments do not want courses which deal with the education of women, as this course must do. Some education people object to the theoretical nature of the foundation material. Some counselor educators object to their students being exposed to many "heretical" ideas before they are thoroughly grounded in the "basics" of a counseling program (thus creating a later need to "unlearn" some of the basics). Some women's studies departments feel the course does not go far enough, or that the research methods are unnecessary. The students of these departments, however, are overwhelmingly enthusiastic in endorsing not only the need for the

course, but for what they receive from doing what is probably an inordinate amount of work for the credits received.

To further develop my course I need time to keep up on the literature (there is now a Counseling Women III (APA, 1979), contact with other professionals who share the interest (hence, this presentation) and continued involvement with task forces, continuing education for psychologist planning groups, licensing officers for both counseling and psychology, and journals which continue to regard the concerns of women in the field as legitimate topics for research and publication. I would say today to Gil Wrenn that we are working towards therapists and counselors who are free from restrictive concepts which affect their female (and male) clients. An affirmative counseling course is a major step in that direction.

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Titles of Completed Research Projects for Counseling of Women Course:

Self Esteem, Role Conflict and Women's Career Orientation

Selected Aspects of Female Sexuality, and their implications for Counseling and research

Implications of Feminist therapy for Women in an Institutional Setting

The Mental Institution

Two Careers: One Family

Counseling Services Available to Women Studies in the Five-College Area

Male/Female Language

Results from a Self-Esteem Survey of Women

The Special Influence of Mothers on Daughters Career Planning